

Foresight yields shady result

By Gordon B. Seavey

Just a century ago, Westford had a very active organization known as the Westford Improvement Society. Most of the names of its members have been lost but it has long been remembered that William E. Frost, energetic principal of the Academy, was its leader and instigator of good ideas.

For one thing, this group was credited with planting the double row of trees, of which a few still remain, encircling the Common. These were a mixture of ash, maples and a few white pine, the latter along the head of the triangle.

The interior of the grounds were left vacant, for in earlier days local militia drilled there...and boys and girls from the Academy used it as a playground. Unlike Lexington's common, our local centerpiece is crowded with all sorts of plantings.

At the turn of the century, it was a delight to ride in a buggy behind the family horse along tree-lined streets, nodding at neighbors and enjoying the landscapes.

The trotting horse and buggy are only memories; few tree-lined streets remain.

But homeowners could do something to add to the natural beauty of Westford should "the spirit move".

Don't wait for Arbor Day to plant an ornamental shrub or two or a tree on the lawn. All the hardwoods grow well in our soils and the evergreens keep their needles to be appreciated in the winter as well as summer.

Commentary

In 1890 the US Department of Agriculture passed a law protecting shade trees along roadways. To encourage this movement, the department issued short spikes with metal tags to attach to trees identifying those worth saving.

Old records show that the Improvement Society asked for 5,000 of these tags along with posters calling attention to the new law and its penalties.

The report to the selectmen indi-

cated that "a large majority of the public are heartily in favor of preserving and encouraging the planting of suitable shade trees, and the law has been generally complied with."

A final suggestion: Trees, like children, grow fast. Problems exist today that were not imagined a century ago. Although maples, locust and oaks are fairly resistant to highway salting in the winter, it is best to plant trees a safe distance from the street.

It is also suggested that trees not be planted beneath or near utility lines...overhead lines and tree branches are not amenable. As newly planted trees reach a certain height under the wires, along comes the tree trimming crews and "snip, snip."

Realtors will tell you that shade trees increase the values of property.

Gordon Seavey, a Westford native, well remembers ruining a saw blade when striking one of those old spikes in a dead log.